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## S. Mountain invaded

*Winter rains brought influx of weeds crowding landscape*

**Ty Young**

The Arizona Republic  
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As residents battle weeds in their front yards, the South Mountain preserve is facing an assault by invasive plant species crowding the desert landscape.

Spurred by the same weather that has produced one of the largest wildflower crops in recent memory, an unusually high volume of fountain grass, buffelgrass and salt cedar plants have sprouted throughout the mountain park. All of the weeds are detrimental to the native environment, park officials said.

"They all compete with the natural vegetation for water and sunlight," said Carlos Sotomayor, South Mountain park ranger. "This (the weeds) will choke out all the other plants and trees."

Buffelgrass, which was added to the state's noxious weed list in March, was introduced to the state by cattle ranchers and is still used for forage in Mexico. The African plant grows to 3 feet in height and looks similar to fountain grass, an African ornamental plant that grows to 3 feet in diameter. Both have purple and red seed-carrying stalks.

"They are probably deposited all over the park," Sotomayor said. "But the biggest areas are around water. This will be a never-ending fight."

Salt cedar, also known as tamarisk, is a large shrub that grows to 12 feet tall. It consumes a large amount of water while excreting a salty residue that increases soil salinity and decreases the likelihood of other plant growth. The salt cedar also shades sunlight from nearby plants.

Because the weeds grow in thick, dense patterns, they become wildfire hazards when they die. But even after death, their effect will be felt for years, said L.D. Walker, noxious weed coordinator with the Bureau of Land Management in Arizona.

"When they dry up and die, they definitely change the fire regimen," he said. "And as it burns, they will come back, but the rest of the vegetation will not."

Although eradicating the perennial weeds may not be possible, the city relies on volunteers to remove the plants from the landscape, said Ted Koester, Phoenix parks and recreation manager.

He requests that people notify the department before heading out, however. Most of the weeds need to be bagged before removal to stop more seeds from spreading into the desert.

Koester also worries that people's good intentions may actually hurt the existing desert.

"We appreciate and encourage people to help us out, but we don't want them to just go out and start pulling things out of the ground," he said. "We need to make sure they're removing the right plants."

To volunteer with the weed removal on South Mountain, call the department's

Natural Resource Division at (602) 495-5458.

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